

**MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE
DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION AND STOCKPILING OF
BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) AND TOXIN
WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION**

Geneva, 14-18 December 2015

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To the Permanent Representatives in Geneva of the
States Parties and Signatories to the Convention on the Prohibition
of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction

11 February 2015

BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION: MEETINGS IN 2015

Excellency,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chairman of the 2015 Meeting of the State Parties of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) to outline my plans for these meetings, and to invite your input and collaboration in preparing for them. I would like to begin by thanking you for the confidence you have expressed in supporting my appointment as Chairman. I am also privileged to enjoy the support of our two distinguished Vice-chairs, Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast of the Netherlands and Ambassador György Molnár, Special Representative of the Foreign Minister for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of Hungary. I will be working closely with them throughout the year.

The Meeting of Experts will be held in Geneva from 10–14 August 2015, and the Meeting of States Parties from 14–18 December 2015. As decided by the Seventh Review Conference, these meetings will “discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action on” the three standing agenda items and the biennial item, the details of which are included on the attached paper for your ease of reference.

We are now entering the last year of our 2012–2015 intersessional programme. Under the chairmanship of my three distinguished predecessors, Ambassador Delmi of Algeria, Ms. Körömi of Hungary, and Ambassador Schmid of Switzerland, we have developed a sound and practical approach to our mandated task, and our work has been characterised by a sense of trust and common purpose. I intend to continue along this path, maintaining our tried and tested working practices, to work with States Parties to build on the solid platform we have created together and to create a strong foundation for the Eighth Review Conference in 2016.

Like Ambassador Schmid, I believe we should continue to give greater focus to the “effective action” part of our mandate. The reports of the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Meetings of States Parties contain a broad range of common understandings, some quite detailed. In 2015, we will continue to discuss, and promote common understanding on the three standing agenda

items and the biennial topic. But as we move ever closer to the Eighth Review Conference, we should continue to turn our attention towards options for promoting effective action. I therefore invite you to provide your feedback in identifying which areas may be ripe for a greater focus on action, and how such action might be achieved in practical terms, within the limits of our mandate. I would be particularly interested in hearing your initial reflections when I meet with the regional groups.

The other specific opportunity we have to build on is the biennial topic. In 2014, we considered how to strengthen implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties. This is an important topic that is of immediate practical concern to many States Parties. Its relevance has been further underlined by the recent events in West Africa, as we heard during last year's meetings. I would welcome your views on how we should further build on our work on this topic this year.

I also believe it is important to continue the effort begun in previous years to "bring in more voices" to our work, to ensure that our work programme benefits from a broader range of expertise and perspectives and that a larger proportion of States Parties can benefit directly from participation in our work programme. These efforts have yielded positive initial results and should be furthered.

In order to ensure that appropriate expertise is present at the Meeting of Experts, I would like to encourage you to start thinking about the composition of your delegations. I am sure that working together to develop the details for the Meeting of Experts as early as possible will help us identify in a timely manner the technical expertise we may need to draw upon.

I will soon start to consider which international organizations and Guests of the Meeting might best contribute to our work this year. I would welcome any thoughts and suggestions you might have on this.

As well as the formal meetings of the intersessional programme, there will be throughout the year a number of workshops, seminars and other events which support our work directly and indirectly. I encourage you to share information on such events with other States Parties and the ISU, to participate wherever possible, and to report back to our formal meetings where relevant and appropriate.

Sponsorship programme

The BWC sponsorship programme, which was established by the Seventh Review Conference in order to support and increase the participation of developing States Parties in BWC meetings, plays an important role in widening participation in our intersessional programme. I urge any States Parties in a position to do so to consider making voluntary contributions to fund this programme. The ISU will shortly circulate instructions on how to apply for sponsorship under the programme in 2015.

Universality

The Seventh Review Conference mandated the Chairman of the intersessional programme to coordinate universalization activities. In this capacity, I am delighted to welcome Mauritania, which acceded on 28 January 2015, as the 172nd State Party to the BWC. However, 24 States remain outside our Convention, and I will be working with the Vice-Chairs, the Depositaries and the ISU on a range of activities to engage with States not party. The ISU has recently updated and improved the pages on the BWC website relating to universalization, so they now provide more practical information for those States considering joining the Convention. I encourage all States Parties to renew their own efforts to encourage others to join the Convention, using all appropriate bilateral, regional and multilateral channels. I would be grateful if you would keep me and the ISU informed of your contacts and any feedback received.

Confidence-Building Measures

I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage all States Parties to participate in the Confidence-building Measures (CBMs), and to remind you that the deadline for submission is 15 April 2015. The Seventh Review Conference adopted revised forms for the CBMs, which are available on the ISU website (www.unog.ch/bwc/cbms). Please contact the ISU if you need any advice or assistance with participating in the CBMs.

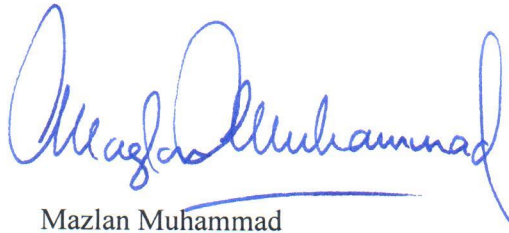
40th anniversary of BWC entry into force

26 March 2015 sees the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the BWC. This is a significant milestone in the life of the Convention and one which I hope we can use to raise the profile of the Convention and promote its universalization. Informal interest has been expressed by some States Parties and several civil society groups/research institutes in organizing an event in Geneva around the time of the anniversary. I will keep you informed on any further developments, but would also welcome any ideas or initiatives you may have to mark this important landmark.

Although I am seeking your views on a number of specific issues, I welcome all ideas and feedback you may have on any aspect of our work this year. This is a collaborative process, not one driven by the Chairman, and I rely on your advice and support. I can be readily contacted by e-mail at mazlan@kln.gov.my, or else through the ISU or the Permanent Mission of Malaysia. I propose to consult the regional groups for an initial exchange of views in the week of 16 March, but please do not hesitate to contact me before then if there is any matter you would like to discuss.

In many ways, 2015 is a special year for the BWC. It is the 40th anniversary of the Convention and the last year of our intersessional programme before the Eighth Review Conference in 2016. I am confident that with active and thorough preparation we can continue to shape an effective programme that makes a genuine contribution to reducing the risks posed to global security by biological weapons. I look forward to working closely with you in pursuit of our shared objective of strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mazlan Muhammad', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Mazlan Muhammad
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of
Malaysia to the UN and other International
Organisations
Chairman of the BWC Meeting of States
Parties

Attachment: Outline of Standing and Biennial Agenda Items (2 pages)

BWC Intersessional Programme 2015
Outline of Standing and Biennial Agenda Items (from BWC/CONF.VII/7)

The purpose of the intersessional programme is to discuss, and promote common understanding and effective action on those issues identified for inclusion in the intersessional programme by this Seventh Review Conference.

A. Standing agenda items

1. Cooperation and assistance, with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation and assistance under Article X

- (a) reports by States Parties on their implementation of Article X, and reports by the ISU on the operation of the database system to facilitate assistance requests and offers;
- (b) challenges and obstacles to developing international cooperation, assistance and exchange in the biological sciences and technology, including equipment and material, for peaceful purposes to their full potential, and possible means of overcoming these;
- (c) a range of specific measures for the full and comprehensive implementation of Article X taking into account all of its provisions, including facilitation of cooperation and assistance, including in terms of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for peaceful purposes, and identification of critical gaps and needs in these areas;
- (d) ways and means to target and mobilize resources, including financial resources, to address gaps and needs for assistance and cooperation, in particular from developed to developing States Parties, and from international and regional organizations and other relevant stakeholders;
- (e) education, training, exchange and twinning programmes and other means of developing human resources in the biological sciences and technology relevant to the implementation of the Convention, particularly in developing countries;
- (f) capacity-building, through international cooperation, in biosafety and biosecurity, and for detecting, reporting, and responding to outbreaks of infectious disease or biological weapons attacks, including in the areas of preparedness, response, and crisis management and mitigation;
- (g) coordination of cooperation with other relevant international and regional organizations, and other relevant stakeholders.

2. Review of developments in the field of science and technology related to the Convention

- (a) new science and technology developments that have potential for uses contrary to the provisions of the Convention;

- (b) new science and technology developments that have potential benefits for the Convention, including those of special relevance to disease surveillance, diagnosis and mitigation;
- (c) possible measures for strengthening national biological risk management, as appropriate, in research and development involving new science and technology developments of relevance to the Convention;
- (d) voluntary codes of conduct and other measures to encourage responsible conduct by scientists, academia and industry;
- (e) education and awareness-raising about risks and benefits of life sciences and biotechnology.
- (f) science- and technology-related developments relevant to the activities of multilateral organizations such as the WHO, OIE, FAO, IPPC and OPCW;
- (g) any other science and technology developments of relevance to the Convention.

The following topical scientific subject will be considered in 2015:

Advances in production, dispersal and delivery technologies of biological agents and toxins

3. Strengthening national implementation

- (a) a range of specific measures for the full and comprehensive implementation of the Convention, especially Articles III and IV;
- (b) ways and means to enhance national implementation, sharing best practices and experiences, including the voluntary exchange of information among States Parties on their national implementation, enforcement of national legislation, strengthening of national institutions and coordination among national law enforcement institutions;
- (c) regional and sub-regional cooperation that can assist national implementation of the Convention;
- (d) national, regional and international measures to improve laboratory biosafety and security of pathogens and toxins;
- (e) any potential further measures, as appropriate, relevant for implementation of the Convention.

B. Biennial item (2014–2015)

How to strengthen implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties.